



Parent Education and Custody Effectiveness

The PEACE Program is an educational program designed to provide information to parents about the divorce and separation process. Our expectation is that this will result in improved parent/child relationships in the reorganized family and a reduction in the number of contested custody, visitation and support disputes that face our courts. Information is provided on:

- The impact of divorce and parental separation on children and how to reduce it.
- The divorce and separation process and its stages.
- The nature and effect of custody litigation on parents and children.
- Parents' legal and moral obligations concerning child-support.
- How the courts decide child custody and support issues.
- How the legal process works and options available.
- Community resources to help divorcing and separating families.

Parents who divorce or separate remain parents. The PEACE Program's purpose is to enable parents to make responsible decisions that recognize their children's need for continuing good relationships with them.

Children are generally better off if parents reduce antagonism and play a meaningful role in their lives after a divorce or separation. However, the safety of parents and children must always be paramount.

Studies show that the higher the level of conflict between divorcing and separating parents, the more harm their children suffer.

Through education, the PEACE Program helps parents understand what is happening to them and their children. Thus, they become better able to keep children out of the conflict.

A National Problem

Projections suggest that half of all children in the nation will experience a parental divorce or marital dissolution before reaching age 18. Large numbers of children whose parents are unmarried also experience the dissolution of their parents' relationship. This situation has enormous implications for parents and children. Parental conflict is the single most important factor in determining whether a child will successfully make the transition that divorce or separation requires. Many children are resilient and are capable of making the adjustments. However, parental divorce and separation can be a time of serious emotional, educational and economic difficulty for some children. It is estimated that approximately 10 percent of all divorces nationwide involve custody disputes. A significant number of child-support disputes also find their way to court. ***Ongoing conflict between parents can have devastating short- and long-term effects on both the parents and children involved.***

PEACE Program Format

The program presents information in a setting where parents can discuss it and have their questions answered. The format includes both large group presentations and small group discussions. A parent does not, however, participate in the same small group as a co-parent. When you register for the program, please inform the program **coordinator** if you believe the child's other parent will also be attending. Since the PEACE Program is committed to ensuring the safety of children and families, please notify the program **coordinator** if there are any concerns about domestic violence, child abuse or neglect or if there is an active order of protection against you or your former partner.

PEACE Program Content

Topic 1: The Child's Experience

Led by trained educational professionals, the session focuses on:

- The effect of divorce and separation on children of different ages and at different stages in the process.
- The child's point of view.
- The behavioral response of children to parental conflict.
- The needs of children during this time and how parents can respond to them.
- Community resources that can help

In addition, parents are shown the PEACE Program video "In the Best Interests of the Children." Children of divorced and separated parents appear on this video and share their feelings and experiences, interspersed with comments from judges, lawyers and mental health professionals. Parents who attend receive a handbook summarizing the information presented as well as a *Children's Bill of Rights*.

Topic 2: The Legal Process

This part of the program focuses on how the legal process resolves disputes that parents do not resolve themselves, such as custody and child support issues. The lawyer-client relationship is described, as is the role of the different courts, law guardian and forensic evaluators who can become involved with parents in dispute about their children. Litigation and its alternatives (including negotiation, mediation and arbitration) are discussed. In addition, an overview of the program, its goals and rationale are presented.

Topic 3: The Adult Experience of Divorce and Separation

A session on the adult experience of separation and divorce is presented by trained, qualified professionals. It concentrates on: